

Guidelines for Videoconferencing Exams

These guidelines for videoconferencing doctoral examinations should be read alongside the Graduate Research School's guidelines for examinations found in the [webbook](#). The roles and expectations of all participants essentially remain the same as outlined online, as do the reporting and outcomes.

Prior to the oral exam – GRS

- Examiners will be invited to recommend the oral proceed to an online exam upon completion of their independent assessment of the thesis.
- The Dean will approve the exam by video based on the independent examiner reports and recommendations. The Dean may contact the examiners to seek agreement if their recommendations vary.
- The candidate will be informed of the recommendation to proceed to an oral examination and if the candidate agrees, in writing, the exam will proceed.
- The GRS will confirm date and time, seeking agreement from all participants. Any time differences between locations will be taken into account to ensure that the candidate is not disadvantaged by an examination taking place at an inappropriate time.
- Exams will be conducted using videoconferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom or Skype for Business). The GRS will create a meeting link for the exam and ensure all participants receive a meeting invitation.
- Mobile or land line phone numbers will be provided to the convenor for all participants.
- Agreement means that participants have access to the appropriate technology (software and hardware) and are comfortable with its use.
- If the candidate chooses not to go to a videoconference oral or if the Dean does not approve a videoconference oral, the exam will be deferred either until such time that a face to face exam can be convened. Dependent on Government and University advice regarding COVID 19, the decision to defer may need to be reconsidered if delays prevent completion in as timely a manner as is possible, without disadvantaging candidates.
- Having agreed to an oral examination using videoconferencing, the candidate will not be permitted to use this as grounds for appeal, unless the circumstances of technical failure or other unforeseen eventualities beyond the control of the examiners were deemed to have adversely affected the candidate's performance.
- Any expenses related to videoconferencing will be borne by the participants in the examination, not the Graduate Research School.

Prior to the oral exam – Convenor

- The convenor will meet with the candidate via Zoom or Skype for Business to explain the exam protocols and format, and to ensure the candidate is familiar with and able to access the technologies.
- The convenor will introduce themselves to the examiners and supervisors by email. A meeting with examiners can be facilitated via videoconference, if preferred or requested.

Prior to the oral exam – Supervisors

- Reports will be released 5-10 days prior to the exam and the supervisor(s) will undertake to ensure the candidate is well-prepared for the oral exam via video.
- A practice exam by videoconference is expected to ensure the candidate is able to access the technology and use it appropriately. Provide guidance and feedback on their presentation and communication skills.
- Alert the convenor to any potential concerns about the candidate's preparedness and readiness for an oral exam by video, as well as their wellbeing, that might jeopardise their performance in the oral exam.

Prior to the oral exam – Candidates

- Review your reports and discuss with your supervisors to ensure you are well prepared.
- Prepare your presentation of 5-10 minutes. If you plan to use Powerpoint or visuals, discuss this with your supervisors and seek their agreement to this approach. Send your Powerpoint or visuals to the convenor 24 hours in advance of the exam.
- Ensure technology works and practice your oral with your supervisors.
- Be sure that you have a quiet, uninterrupted space for your exam. Set up the room, remembering things like the wall/image behind you, having paper pen, and a glass or bottle of water.

During the oral exam

- The exam will be attended by the Massey examiner and New Zealand examiner, as well as up to 2 supervisors, unless by prior agreement and arrangement with the convenor and GRS, the international examiner's attendance is agreed.
- Candidates may request to have a support person in the room with them. In New Zealand, under COVID-19 alert levels 3 and 4, the support person must be an adult who resides in the same household. Candidates who are overseas need to abide by the requirements of the country in which they are residing to ensure physical distancing and isolation is maintained. The support person does not have a speaking role and should not intervene verbally or physically at any time during the examination.
- The convenor and examiners will meet in the videoconferencing 'room' (Zoom or Skype) 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the exam. This will enable a brief discussion for how the exam might proceed, questions from overseas to address, etc.
- The candidate and supervisors will join at the appointed time. Introductions will be made and the supervisor will confirm the candidate in the videoconference is in fact the student.
- The candidate will commence with their presentation. If a PowerPoint or visuals are required, the candidate may share their screen with participants.
- During the exam, microphones should be muted unless speaking and members should raise their hands to speak. The chat functionality should not be used during the examination unless initiated by the convenor to advise participants to start the meeting again due to technological difficulties.
- If technology fails at any point, the convenor will instruct all participants to exit the meeting and attempt to re-join the meeting.
- During the exam, the candidate's camera should remain on at all times, but supervisors, the convenor or examiners may need to turn their cameras off to improve quality, if the convenor deems this appropriate. All participants may use headphones which can assist in avoiding echo effects.
- If the technology fails then the exam may be suspended and a new meeting date and time will be agreed. The exam will not proceed nor be conducted via phone.
- It is the convenor's responsibility to suspend the exam and to decide whether it is possible for the examination to continue or whether the exam should be rescheduled.

- All participants should be asked to confirm at the conclusion of the oral that the holding of the examination by videoconference has had no substantive bearing on the examination process.
- The candidate and supervisor will be asked to leave the meeting at the end of the oral exam. The convenor will place them in a breakout room via the 'manage participants' tab. Following the conclusion of discussions between the examiners and convenor, the supervisor(s) and candidate will be invited back through the same manage participants tab.
- During the discussion with examiners, the convenor will invite comment on the conduct of the examination and should refer explicitly to the use of video-conferencing in the report to the DRC. The convenor should comment on the technical performance of the exam, including any difficulties, in their report.

Following the exam, the supervisors and candidate may plan for another discussion and a virtual celebration of having completed the oral examination. Think about sharing a cup of tea or coffee – or even a celebratory toast of bubbles! A screenshot of the examiners, candidate, supervisors and convenor at the end of the exam might be taken and shared on social media, if all parties are agreeable. A discussion about the examiners' feedback and ongoing support for any emendations will need to follow in due course.

Videoconferencing Protocols (using Zoom)

It is important to join with video so that, when you speak, other participants can see you. It is easier to interact with a live picture than simply a name. The video of the person speaking should appear in the middle of your screen larger than non-speaking participants. The "participants" tab along the bottom of the screen shows you the list of participants. You can click on the tab and edit your name so that it shows as your preferred name, rather than initials or sign-in name.

Please ensure you mute your microphone when you join the meeting. If you wish to speak during the meeting, please click on the "participants" tab. This opens a side panel, with the option at the bottom of that panel to "raise hand". The Convenor will signal who is to speak next. Please do not just speak without signalling your wish to speak first. Remember that supervisors do not have a speaking role in the examination, unless invited to do so by the convenor or an examiner. Anyone supporting the candidate may introduce themselves, but also does not have an active speaking role.

Please unmute yourself when it is your turn to speak, select mute again when you have finished speaking, and then click "lower hand". If you follow these protocols, and be courteous, kind and patient, this will ensure the exam works well with a good level of discussion.

More information on Zoom is available on Massey's [website](#).

Zoom's Help Centre provides [instructions](#) on screen sharing a PowerPoint presentation.

Information on joining a Skype for Business meeting is available [here](#).

Advice on presenting PowerPoint slides in a Skype for Business meeting is available on their [website](#).

Videoconferencing Etiquette and Presentation Advice

Just Google and you will find lots of advice and support, and these are a few good pages:

- <https://www.owllabs.com/blog/video-conferencing-etiquette>
- <https://highfive.com/blog/video-presentation-tips>
- <https://www.genardmethod.com/blog/video-conferencing-how-to-speak-dynamically-in-front-of-the-camera>